

newsday.com/iphone/ny-liwhal0227,0,673377.story

newsday.com

Humpback whale off N.J. coast saved

BY DAVID J. LOPEZ

david.lopez@newsday.com

8:46 PM EST, February 26, 2009

Freed Willy.

The humpback whale that became entangled in a lobster pot and netting south of the Rockaways has been released, the U.S. Coast Guard said Thursday night.

A rescue team out of Massachusetts cut the fishing gear, which had been wrapped around the whale's tail, and the whale was freed at 4:39 p.m. off the coast of Sandy Hook, N.J., the Coast Guard said.

"It does have serious injuries, but it is much better off than being anchored in the shipping lane," Teri Frady, of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said in a news release.

The rescuers, from the Massachusetts-based Center for Coastal Studies, began working with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration staff to free the whale at about 11:30 a.m. Thursday.

The Coast Guard learned of the trapped whale Wednesday afternoon and set up a 500-yard safety zone around it -- eight miles east of Sandy Hook, N. J., and near active shipping lanes. The Coast Guard Cutter Penobscot Bay and a vessel from the NOAA went to the scene to protect the animal.

The whale was described as a juvenile humpback, about 25 to 30 feet long, according to Jamison Smith, the large whale disentanglement coordinator for NOAA.

"It had curvature on its back from the weight of the gear pulling down on it, but the primary entanglement was the line wrapped around it tail, which caused a gash," said Teri Frady, a spokeswoman for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Smith said on Wednesday that the entanglement was "potentially life-threatening" and that freeing the whale could be "very dangerous both for the animal and for the rescuers." He said an entanglement

happens in local waters "once every year or every other year."

The site was not far from where a family of 16 bottlenose dolphins stayed in two rivers near the Sandy Hook Bay for half of last year, sparking a heated debate over whether they should be removed or left to leave on their own.

Three of the dolphins died, and employees of a nearby restaurant said they saw about five leave the Shrewsbury River and go out to Sandy Hook Bay just before the river froze last month. The fate of the remaining eight dolphins is not known, but a helicopter search earlier this month failed to spot any dolphins, alive or dead.

Copyright © 2009, [Newsday Inc.](#)